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ABSTRACT

An exploratory study examined the effectiveness of a Public Relations Management course offered over a 6-month period in a 3-weekend accelerated curriculum format. The theoretical framework from which the study was designed is derived from Malcolm Knowles' andragogy theory of adult learning. The study investigated how students in the class (graduate students enrolled in a mid-western university) rated its effectiveness in relation to the assumptions of the andragogy theory; how students rated its effectiveness in relation to academic performance; and how students rated its format effectiveness. Results indicated: (1) the majority of students who had taken a class in the three-weekend format at least four times were happy with the overall content; (2) students in the 30-39 year-old category viewed the three-weekend format more positively than did the older and younger students; and (3) there was a strong positive significant relationship between gender and academic performance, format, and class content with regard to the three-weekend curriculum format. (Contains 9 references; appendixes contain 14 tables and scale statements.) (RS)

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Running Head: THREE-WEEKEND FORMAT

A National Study of a Three-Weekend Accelerated Class Format Within the Public Relations Curriculum

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of Public Relations Management courses offered over a six-month period in a three-weekend accelerated curriculum format. The theoretical framework from which this study was designed is derived from Malcolm Knowles' andragogy theory of adult learning. This study addresses the following three research questions: **RQ1:** How do students who are enrolled in this class format rate its effectiveness in relation to the assumptions of the andragogy theory? **RQ2:** How do students who are enrolled in this class format rate its effectiveness in relation to academic performance? **RQ3:** How do students who are enrolled in this class format rate its format effectiveness?

This exploratory study is designed within the theoretical framework of andragogy, the "art and science of helping adults learn" (Knowles, 1980, p. 43). The intention of the descriptive research is to examine a three-weekend accelerated classroom format that has been designed especially for adults who, for a variety of reasons, can not attend a traditional 16-week class. The overarching purpose of the study is to investigate students' assessment of this special curriculum design to determine whether it meets their needs in three areas: andragogical principles, academic performance, and class format.

According to a 1995 report by the National Center for Education Statistics, approximately 76 million students over the age of 25 are enrolled in some form of adult-education classes. This figure represents 40 % of American adults. These figures have made a significant jump over the past four years; in 1991 the percentage of adults totaled 32 % (Lawrence, 1998). As demonstrated by these data, adult students are becoming a dominant population on college campuses. Some merely seek more knowledge to quench their inquisitive thirst; others are required by their employers to earn extended degrees in order to qualify for raises and promotions. As importantly is the fact that distance learning programs -- which enable students to take classes away from the main campus -- is predicted to grow nationally at a rate of between 15 % and 20% a year (Gendreau, 1996).

Adult students have different needs than those of the traditionally-aged students. While some of these adult students have time constraints due to working full-time and raising families, others have geographic constraints; a campus may not be located within a reasonable driving distance. Further, these students go through the learning process and approach learning differently than their younger counterparts. As university adult student enrollment continues to

increase, meeting the instructional needs of this population is paramount. Serving students should include investigating curriculum structure as well as different teaching style preference. Researchers can turn to adult learning theories for a foundation from which to develop their studies.

Review of the Literature

Adult learning theories have a substantial history, dating back as early as 1926 when Eduard Lindeman laid the foundation for a systematic theory about adult learning in his seminal publication, The Meaning of Adult Education. He states, "Adult education is a process through which learners become aware of significant experience. Recognition of significance leads to evaluation. Meanings accompany experience when we know what is happening and what importance the event includes for our own personalities" (1926, p. 169). Lindeman's research was concerned with how adults learn; his research was strongly influenced by philosopher John Dewey (Knowles, 1990). Systematic in nature, Lindeman proposed that students constitute the starting point for education -- not the subject matter and the teachers. He explains that in conventional education the student is required to "adjust" to the curriculum; this new way of thinking encourages the curriculum to be developed around the needs of the student. Lindeman explains, "Texts and teachers play a new role and secondary role in this type of education; they must give way to the primary importance of the learners" (1926, p. 8).

Modern adult learning, including andragogy, has its foundations in Lindeman's assumptions: 1) Adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy 2) Adults' orientation to learning is life-centered 3) Experience is the richest source for adults' learning 4) Adults have a deep need to be self-directing 5) Individual differences among

people increase with age (Moore & Bogotch, 1993, p. 3). Knowles uses Lindeman's work as a springboard to further study adult learning as a process.

Andragogy vs. Pedagogy

Knowles' key contribution to the adult learning literature includes an acute distinction between andragogy and pedagogy. Definitions of each are necessary for clarification purposes. Pedagogy is defined as "the art and science of teaching children" (Knowles, 1990, p. 28). The word is derived from the Greek words "paid," meaning "child" and "agogus," meaning "leader of." This theory proposes a set of beliefs based on six assumptions: 1) students do not need to know why they must learn something; they only need to know that it will enable them to pass the class; 2) the teacher's concept of the students is based on dependent personalities; students also view themselves as dependent upon their teacher; 3) the actual experiences of the learning situation is of little worth to students; 4) students become ready to learn once the teacher tells them they must learn it in order to pass the class; 5) students have a subject-centered orientation to learning; 6) students are motivated to learn by extrinsic motivators such as grades, parental pressures and the teacher's approval or disapproval (Knowles, 1990).

Andragogy, on the other hand, represents the art and science of assisting adults in the learning process. This theory also proposes a set of beliefs based on six assumptions: 1) adult students need to know why they need to learn something before they engage in learning it; they want to know ahead of time how it applies to their every day lives; 2) adult students possess the self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions and lives; they expect the teacher to view them this way as well; 3) the adult students' experiences are very valuable to them; they want to incorporate their life experiences into their learning situations; 4) adults enter a learning situation

eager to learn, further, they use the material they learn to "cope effectively" with real-life situations 5) adult students have a task- or problem-centered orientation to learning 6) adult students are motivated to learn by extrinsic motivators such as promotions, better jobs, higher salaries as well as by intrinsic motivators such as desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, and quality of life (Knowles, 1990)

Aside from the difference in assumptions, Knowles makes two particular distinctions between pedagogy and andragogy. First, he believes that andragogy represents a system of an alternative set of assumptions, unlike pedagogy which represents an idealogy. Second, he explains that andragogy represents assumptions which include the pedagogical assumptions. On the other hand, the pedagogical view is more rigid. Under this particular condition, these assumptions are the only realistic assumptions related to teaching whereas andragogy proposes that it is the educators' responsibility to determine whether andragogical or pedagogical assumptions are applicable to the learning situation. Knowles adds that these assumptions need to continuously be tested in different situations. Hence, andragogy is situational in nature, pedagogy is not.

Knowles (1990) further distinguishes the androgogical model from other models related to education. He explains that traditional pedagogical models are content-oriented while the andragogical model is process-oriented, meaning it is concerned with providing procedures and resources for helping learners acquire information and skills. On the other hand, the content models are mainly concerned with transmitting information and skills. The facilitator or trainer practicing these models has already established the most efficient means for transmitting this content, whether it be a lecture, reading, lab exercise, etc., whereas the andragogical trainer

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prepares a set of procedures for involving the learners in mutual planning of how they will acquire the information.

The implications of these andragogy assumptions are that learning should be based on peoples' life experiences and focused on life situations. Curriculum should allow adult learners to integrate their experiences into classroom projects and assignments. The role of the instructor should be more of an "engager" than of a "transmitter." Further, teaching strategies should take into account differences in time, place, styles and pace (Knowles, 1990, p. 31). With the latter premise in mind, this study seeks to examine whether the three-weekend format does indeed meet the needs of these adult students. Since these classes are offered at times, in places, and in ways that are more conducive to the non-traditional adult learners who enroll in them, a positive response is postulated.

It is interesting to note that this paradigm shift from an instructor-centered to a student-centered classroom parallels what is taking place in the business industry. Classical theories in the early 1900s focused on scientific management; these theories used scientific methods to define the "one best way" to get the job done. Rigid guidelines were applied to all employees in order to enhance efficiency and productivity. It wasn't until the famous Hawthorne studies were conducted that managers began to shift their focus from production to the *human* side of management. Ironically, these studies took place about the same time as Lindeman published his book on adult learning which focused on students rather than on the institution. Present day management theories continue to center around employees' wants and needs. Coined "contemporary management" or "the contingent approach," managers and researchers alike are interested in trying to develop strategies that benefit both the employees and the organizations for

which they work. Areas of study include cross-functional work teams, flextime, a compressed work week, telecommuting and total quality management (Robbins & Coulter, 1996). This contingent approach is indicative of what the andragogy theory is all about; it posits that curriculum should be contingent upon the wants and needs of its adult students. The commonality between adult learning and management theories in present day is that they both focus from within. The emphasis is on the students and employees, or, in marketing terms, on the "target audiences" they serve.

Having conducted a meta-analysis of 18 experimental studies related to andragogy, Rachel (1994) makes the following point: "Andragogical methods do not alone transform an educator bereft of instructional ability into a paragon of teaching effectiveness; nor are pedagogues inescapably doomed to sterile didacticism" (p. 25).

Sharon Merriam, professor of adult education at the University of Georgia, summarizes the current state of adult learning theories:

> It is doubtful that a phenomemon as complex as adult learning will ever be explained by single theory, model or set of principles. Instead, we have case of the proverbial elephant being described differently depending on who is talking and on which part of the animal is being examined. Where we are headed, it seems, is toward a multi-faceted understanding of adult learning, reflecting the inherent richness and complexity of the phenomenon" (Zemke & Zemke, 1995, p. 31).

Method

The study consisted of a nationwide convenience sample of 95 graduate students who enrolled in a Public Relations Management class taught via the extended learning program of a

mid-sized midwestern state university. The time frame for the study consisted of August, 1998, to February, 1999. All seven classes studied were offered in a three-weekend accelerated format. This format requires students to meet over a six-week period. Classes are held every other weekend on Fridays from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. and on Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.; attendance is mandatory. This format also requires that students complete "pre-class assignments" and readings prior to the first Friday night class session. A review of each of the seven classes' syllabi indicates that all seven instructors used the same textbook and required students to complete similar class assignments, including case study analyses, exams, and to participate in group discussions.

This study seeks answers to the following research questions. **RQ1:** How do students who are enrolled in this class format rate its effectiveness in relation to the assumptions of the andragogy theory? **RQ2:** How do students who are enrolled in this class format rate its effectiveness in relation to academic performance? **RQ3:** How do students who are enrolled in this class format rate its format effectiveness?

A survey method was employed for this study. Students were asked to fill out a three-page, 38-item self-administered questionnaire. Twenty-eight items represented various statements related to class format, academic performance, and class content. Students were asked to rate each statement on a seven-point Likert scale where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree. The remaining items asked various demographic questions and other questions related to why the students took the class in this format.

Results

A total of 41 men and 54 women participated in this study. With regard to employment, 80 are employed full-time, 4 are employed part-time, and 2 are unemployed. From this sample, 76 work during the day, 4 work during the night and 15 work varied hours (both day and night).

Fifty percent (45 of the students) represent the 30-39 age range while the other 50% represent the 22-29 age range (25 students) and 40-59 age range (25 students).

In order to examine the three research questions, various statements related to class format, academic performance and class content (which addresses the andragogy principles) were submitted to a confirmatory factor analysis. "Format" statements addressed how students rated the format of the three-weekend accelerated curriculum. "Academic Performance" statements addressed how students rated the format of the three-weekend curriculum in relation to their academic performance. Finally, "Content" statements addressed how students rated the three-weekend format in relation to the six andragogy principles. (See Appendix A for a listing of each set of statements.) The Cronbach alpha coefficients obtained for these scales are relatively high, suggesting that they are internally consistent: Format, $\alpha = .91$; Academic Performance, $\alpha = .81$; and Content, $\alpha = .80$. (See Appendix B for eigenvalues and percentage of variance explained.)

For examination of the results in terms of their usefulness to educators and ability to address RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3, the three factors (format, content, academic performance) were further collapsed and three new scales were constructed. These new scales divided student scores into three categories (low, medium, and high); they were calculated by dividing the cumulative percentages into thirds. The three newly constructed scales were than submitted to a chi-square statistical test in order to compare the following three variables: number of times a class was taken in the three-weekend format, gender, and age. When measured against format, variables of age and number of times students took classes in this format warranted no statistical differences. However, gender indicated a meaningful score; it approached significance, χ^2 (2, N = 95) = 5.07, p = .079. (See Appendix C, Table 1b). Note: This significance is consistent with cross-tabulation

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results. The other two factors -- content and academic performance -- warranted no statistical significances in relationship to number of times students took classes in this format, their gender or age.

However, a closer examination of the data reveals that although not significant, there are identifiable relationships among the variables; in fact, several patterns evolved. All of the three new scales were submitted to a cross-tabulation analysis to examine the relationship among the following variables: number of times students took classes in the three-weekend format, gender, and age.

The first pattern observed is related to gender. Females rated higher than did the males across all three factors. A total of 71.4% of the females rated high on format, 61.3% rated high on academic performance, and 62.9% rated high on content. (See Appendix C, Tables 1b, 2b, and 3b)

A second tendency among the data is related to age. The students in the 30-39 year-old category rated higher across all three factors than did the 20-29 year-olds and the 40+ year-olds. On format, they rated 54.8%, 37.9% and 45.7%; on content they rated 55.6%, 41.7%, and 40.0%; and on academic performance they rated 45.2%, 51.5%, and 41.9%. (See Appendix C, Tables 1c, 2c, and 3c)

A third distinct pattern was found among scores related to the number of times students took classes in the three-weekend format. Among both the content and academic performance factors, students scored highest when they took the class at least 2-3 times in the three-weekend format; however, their scores then tapered off when they took the class 4+ times in this manner. Overall, these two factors indicated that students seemed most pleased with the format when they took it in this manner only 2-3 times. However, the format factor indicated that students rated it

the highest when they took the class 4+ times in this particular three-weekend format (See Appendix C, Tables 1a, 2a, and 3a)

Significance of the Findings

Results of this study will be meaningful to educators and administrators who are interested in further refining course curriculum designed specifically for non-traditional adult learners who enroll in their programs. Answers to the proposed research questions are further elaborated upon in this section. First, based on the three factors addressed in this study (format, content, academic performance) females consistently rated the three-weekend format higher than did the males. Reasons for these higher scores could be that women juggle many tasks during the week (e.g., taking care of the children, working, keeping up the house, etc.) and appreciate having an opportunity to take classes -- even if the classes do tap into their weekends. Men, on the other hand, may view weekend classes as a violation of the quality time they may have allocated for spending with their wives and children, for completion of projects around the house, or even for leisure and recreational activities.

Second, the results indicate that the 30-39 year-old students rated higher on all three factors than did the younger students or the 40 year-old+ students. Reasons for these scores may be related to the notion that this age group, which encompasses the early-aged Generation X-ers and the tail-end of the Baby Boomers, may have a stronger quest for knowledge. Therefore, they don't mind taking time out of their weekend in order to earn their degrees whereas the younger students (20-29) may not feel as strongly toward having to give up their weekends in order to take classes. And on the other end of this reasoning, the 40 year-old+ students may look at their weekends as "sacred" and may not believe school is the number one priority when it comes to allocating time on the weekends; they may be at a stage in their lives where they view other

activities more importantly than attending classes. In short, these two age groups have different priorities than do the 30-39 year-old category.

Third, findings indicate that in relations to format and academic performance, students seem happy taking a class in this format once, twice, even three times. However, by the time they take classes four or more times in this format, their contentment tapers off, possibly due to burn out. However, on the format factor they scored highest on taking the class 4+ times. Considering that this factor addresses the assumptions of andragogy, high contentment in this area speaks directly to RQ1, supporting the answer that students do have a high regard for the three-weekend curriculum in relation to its content.

Further, many of these students reported that they take another class in addition to the weekend class. Within this particular program, the university offers classes in eight-week sessions as well as on weekends. Classes are held one night for 4.5 hours over an eight-week period. Many students said that in order to maximize their class-taking opportunities, many of them take an eight week class ***plus*** a weekend class during both sessions. This allows them to complete four classes in a 16-week session while still going to work full-time, which may also account for the burn-out syndrome.

Of special interest to public relations educators are the reasons why students took the Public Relations Management class in the first place. (See Appendix C, Table 5). When asked to indicate the main reason *why* they took this class, 29% of students reported that the class was required for their major or certificate program. However, nearly 50% indicated that they took it as an elective while another 18% said they believed the class material would benefit their careers. In terms of why they took the Public Relations Class in this particular *format*, the majority (67%) of the students reported that the time was conducive to their schedules. Also related to

convenience were the other 5% who said the program center was conveniently located. An additional 5% reported that they commute to the program center which offers classes they need and they spend the weekend in a hotel. The remaining students reported that they wanted to try a new class format (5%), needed this particular class to graduate (13%) and various "other" reasons (5%).

A sidebar note: According to the Director of Distance Learning for this university's program, one of the characteristics of the program that students find enticing is the flexibility they have to take classes at different program centers throughout the state. Students enrolled in this program have been known to travel from program center to program center in order to take classes they need that may not be offered at another location. Further, a particular class may be offered elsewhere in a format that they find to be more beneficial to them personally (e.g., the three-weekend format being more convenient for their lifestyle). It is not unusual for students to take classes at several different program centers throughout the state in order to complete their degrees in a timely manner. A few students commented on their questionnaires that they have taken classes at five different sites in order to graduate on time; they added that they are very pleased to have such an opportunity.

As with all studies, this one had some limitations. First, since a convenience sample was studied, the results are not generalizable to all adult student populations. However, as is the case with many studies which focus on curriculum design and teaching methods, the reason behind conducting this study was not necessarily to determine statistical significance but to instead seek answers to questions that may aid educators in better adhering to the needs of their students. Nevertheless, randomization is indeed a suggestion for future studies of this nature. Further, it

may be advantageous to run a longitudinal study to determine patterns and trends over time. Finally, a larger sample size would be more advantageous.

Conclusion

This exploratory study proved to be very fruitful in its findings. In sum, it revealed that the majority of students in this particular sample who had taken a class in the three-weekend format at least four times were happy with the overall content, therefore supporting the andragogy theory, which advocates special curriculum needs for adult students. The results also revealed that those students in the 30-39 year-old category viewed the three-weekend format more positively than did the older and younger students. Finally, the data indicate a strong positive significant relationship between gender and academic performance, format, and class content with regard to the three-weekend curriculum format.

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Appendix A

Format Scale Statements:

This class format fits my academic needs.

This class format is suitable for this type of class.

This class format should be continued with this particular class.

I would recommend that more classes be taught in this particular format.

I would like to take more classes in this format.

It was easy to remain attentive in this class.

My general attitude toward this type of instructional format is positive.

Academic Performance Scale Statements:

I believe I got as much as possible out of this class.

This particular format enhanced my learning of the subject.

I believe I learned more from this particular format than I would have expected by taking it in a traditional course which meets over a 15-week period.

I believe my academic achievement in this type of class format is higher than my academic achievement would be in a traditional 15-week class.

Content Scale Statements:

This class enabled me to incorporate my own personal experiences into class assignments and activities.

The material covered in this class is applicable to my "real world" experiences.

This class allowed me to use my problem-solving skills.

This class offered me the opportunity to apply theories, principles, and concepts in a way that was useful for my individual academic purposes -- not for those of a "collective audience."

I was more intrinsically motivated to take this class (example: it increases self-esteem, job satisfaction, and/or quality of life).

Appendix B

"Format" Factor

Statement	Eigenvalues	Percent of Variance Explained
1	4.52	64.88
2	.146	2.08
3	.769	10.99
6	.507	7.24
10	.339	4.84
11	.244	3.48
13	.453	6.46

"Academic Performance" Factor

Statement	Eigenvalues	Percent of Variance Explained
5	.720	18.00
8	.424	10.60
12	2.54	63.66
14	.309	7.72

"Content" Factor

Statement	Eigenvalues	Percent of Variance Explained
23	2.85	56.93
24	.899	17.99
25	.545	10.89
26	.470	9.39
27	.240	4.79

Appendix C

Tables 1a-c

#1a -- FORMAT Scale Cross-Tabulated with Number of Times Student Took the Course In the Three-Weekend Format

TIMES TAKEN	Low	Medium	High
Once	35.5%	27.6%	11.4%
2-3 Times	**35.5%**	**37.9%**	**45.7%**
4+	29.0%	34.5%	42.9%

X^2 (4, N = 95) = 5.49, p = .240

#1b -- FORMAT Scale Cross-Tabulated with Gender

GENDER	Low	Medium	High
Female	45.2%	51.7%	**71.4%**
Male	54.8%	48.3%	28.6%

X^2 (2, N = 95) = 5.06, p = .079

#1c -- FORMAT Scale Cross-Tabulated with Age

TIMES TAKEN	Low	Medium	High
20-29 year-olds	29%	27.6%	22.9%
30-39 year-olds	**54.8%**	**37.9%**	**45.7%**
40 years-old +	16.1%	35.5%	31.4%

X^2 (4, N = 95) = 3.37, p = .498

Tables 2a-c

#2a – ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE Scale Cross-Tabulated with Number of Times Student Took the Course In the Three-Weekend Format

TIMES TAKEN	Low	Medium	High
Once	25.8%	27.3%	19.4%
2-3 Times	32.3%	**54.5%**	32.3%
4+	**41.9%**	18.2%	**48.4%**

X^2 (4, N = 95) = 7.69, p = .103

#2b -- ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE Scale Cross-Tabulated with Gender

GENDER	Low	Medium	High
Female	45.2%	63.6%	**61.3%**
Male	54.8%	36.4%	38.7%

X^2 (2, N = 95) = 2.59, p = .273

#2c -- ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE Scale Cross-Tabulated with Age

TIMES TAKEN	Low	Medium	High
20-29 year-olds	32.3%	18.2%	29.0%
30-39 year-olds	**45.2%**	**51.5%**	**41.9%**
40-year olds +	22.6%	30.3%	29.0%

X^2 (4, N = 95) = 2.05, p = .725

Tables 3a-c

#3a -- CONTENT Scale Cross-Tabulated with Number of Times Student Took the Course In the Three-Weekend Format

TIMES TAKEN	Low	Medium	High
Once	27.8%	20.8%	22.9%
2-3 Times	30.6%	**54.2%**	**40.0%**
4+ Times	**41.7%**	25.0%	37.1%

X^2 (4, N = 95) = 3.48, p = .481

#3b -- CONTENT Scale Cross-Tabulated with Gender

GENDER	Low	Medium	High
Female	50.0%	58.3%	**62.9%**
Male	50.0%	41.7%	37.1%

X^2 (2, N = 95) = 1.22, p = .542

#3c -- CONTENT Scale Cross-Tabulated with Age

TIMES TAKEN	Low	Medium	High
20-29 year-olds	25.0%	25.0%	28.6%
30-39 year-olds	**55.6%**	**41.7%**	**40.0%**
40-year olds +	19.4%	33.3%	31.4%

X^2 (4, N = 95) = 2.53, p = .639

Table 4

Why Students Took the Class in This Particular Format

REASON	Total Who Answered This Way
Convenient time	64
I wanted to try a new format	4
Program Center was conveniently located	5
No Center in driving distance: I take weekend classes and spend the weekend at a hotel	5
Needed this class to graduate	12
Reason other than those above	5

Table 5

Why Students Took This Particular Class

REASON	Total Who Answered This Way
Required for my major	24
Required for my certificate program	4
Took as an elective	48
Thought material would benefit my career	17
Reason other than those above	2